



DARK CANYON

Area Information:

Dark Canyon begins high on the edge of Elk Ridge (8800 feet in elevation) and ends at 3700 feet elevation in the desert environment of upper Lake Powell. The Dark Canyon drainage is primarily administered by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The Forest Service manages the upper end of the canyon; The USFS Dark Canyon Wilderness Area (45,000 acres). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers the lower end of the canyon as a primitive area; The Dark Canyon Primitive Area (62,000 acres). The extreme lower end of Dark Canyon is within the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and is administered by the National Park Service.

Wildlife/Grazing:

Dark Canyon has many interesting wildlife species. At upper elevation, black bear, deer, elk and mountain lions may occasionally be seen. In the lower elevations there are desert bighorn sheep, ringtail cats and bobcats. Coyotes are found at all elevation, as there are many species of birds.

Livestock use of the BLM administered Dark Canyon Primitive Area is very limited because of the extremely rugged terrain. Grazing occurs primarily in Fable Valley and on mesas above the canyons. A cattle trail through Fable Valley is used each year to move livestock between Beef Basin and Dark Canyon Plateau. Grazing use is restricted to winter and spring. Lower Dark Canyon is not grazed by livestock.

Weather/Road Conditions:

The lower elevation trailheads in Dark Canyon are extremely hot in summer; spring and fall are the preferred times to travel. The upper trailheads, often inaccessible in spring due to snow or mud, are pleasant to hike in the summer, but the lower that one hikes into the canyon, the more oppressive temperatures become. Seasonal rains come from mid-July to September. This may cause flash flooding and lightning.

Road conditions vary greatly with the weather. Generally they are slippery when wet. High clearance vehicles are recommended and slick road conditions may require four wheel drive but most trails are accessible by regular passenger cars under dry road conditions. Elk Ridge reaches 8800 feet and the road is generally open only from May through October. Certain portions of the road are in shade and snow melt comes late. Check first with the Forest Service and BLM before using these roads.

Trailheads:

1. The Sundance Trail is the primary access route into the lower portion of Dark Canyon.
2. Fable Valley is part of the BLM's Dark Canyon Primitive Area. The valley is approximately eight miles long and can be reached by one of two trailheads. The southern trailhead from Dark Canyon Plateau is more easily accessible; the northern trailhead from Beef Basin is very hard to reach. Fable Valley does not get extensive back country use. It has been historically used by cattle; currently livestock do not graze here on a regular basis.

More specific information about all trailheads managed by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service can be found in The Dark Canyon Trail Guide published by Canyonlands Natural History Association. This can be found at: <http://www.cnha.org>.

Detailed maps showing road and trail access are available at the office of the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM in Monticello, at the Monticello Multi-Agency Visitor Center, and at Canyonlands Natural History Association.